

Cultural Snapshots: South America

Argentina



Argentina lies in the southern portion of

South America and borders with Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay. The capital city is Buenos Aires. The official language is Spanish.

Argentines are primarily of European descent, which distinguishes it from other Latin American countries. Culturally, Argentina is more closely tied to Europe than to South America and many people trace their heritage back to Italy. Unlike other South American countries, there is little mix with the native Indian culture. A strong sense of personal honor underlies much personal, professional, and community life.

Communication styles depend on the individual but generally Argentines are candid and direct yet tactful. They are not reserved in expressing passions or sentimentality. Avoid confrontation, as they do not like to admit publicly that they are wrong. Argentines also have a difficult time saying no; disagreement may not surface during meetings.

Comfortable personal space is considerably closer than in North America; Argentines may touch each other when speaking and generally stand very close to each other when speaking.

When introduced, a handshake and warm smile are appropriate. Eye contact demonstrates interest. In a group, the eldest or most important person is introduced first. At a social gathering, wait for the host to introduce you to other guests. When leaving a meeting or social occasion, say goodbye to each person individually.

In business, an introduction through a trusted mutual contact can smooth the way as Argentines prefer to do business with people they know and trust.

Relationships are very important and building a network of contacts is essential to doing business. Argentines strive for a network of friends and connections who can be called on for favors and assistance. Nepotism is seen as a good thing because it assures loyalty and trust. Business relationships are

with individuals, not their companies.

Appearances matter and you will be judged not only on the basis of what you say or do, but also how you dress and present yourself.

Appointments should be made 1–2 weeks in advance by phone or e-mail arrive on time for meetings although you may be kept waiting. In some very traditional companies, the higher up the person you are meeting with, the longer you will be kept waiting. Meetings are for getting acquainted and discussion, not for making decisions. Business cards are exchanged without ritual. Hierarchy is very important and Argentines like to do business with people of similar status. The decisions are made by the upper levels of the hierarchy outside of the meeting. Business tends to be quite bureaucratic and the pace of making decisions and taking action is rather slow because several levels of approval are needed.

Meetings begin with some small talk to establish rapport before getting down to business. Do not be surprised if the person you

are meeting with accepts phone calls or attends to other matters.

If you are invited to a home, bring a small gift. Avoid gifts

of scissors or knives as they signify severing a relationship. Dressing well for the occasion shows respect for the host. Punctuality is not expected

for social occasions, particularly large dinner parties; arriving 30 – 45 minutes later than invited is acceptable.

Brazil



Brazil is the largest country in South

America, occupying almost half of the continent. Its most populous cities are Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. Its capital city, Brasilia, lies inland.

Unlike its neighbors, the official language of Brazil is Portuguese, not Spanish. Brazilian society is an amalgam of European, African, and indigenous peoples. Although Brazilians do not consider themselves racially aware, social distinctions based on skin color are common. There are also class distinctions based on social standing and the upper classes have only brief interactions with lower classes, who may be employed as household workers.

The family provides the foundation for a network of relatives and friends—an essential part of Brazilian life. Brazilians like to do business with people they know, so a

relationship is essential to getting things done. Loyalty is to the individual, not the company. Nepotism is considered a good thing because it assures loyalty and trustworthiness.

When introduced, a handshake is an appropriate greeting between men; a woman should extend her hand first. Close female associates may exchange an air kiss on both cheeks (left cheek first). Business cards are exchanged with everyone in the group.

Appearances matter, as Brazilians tend to be quite style conscious and will judge you based on your apparel and accessories.

Face-to-face interaction is much preferred over written communication. During meetings, everyone present may express an opinion. It is not considered impolite to interrupt when another is speaking. Saving face is an important value; criticizing another causes a loss of face

for both individuals. Meetings begin with small talk to build rapport. Decisions are made outside of meetings at the upper levels of hierarchy. Negotiations are often conducted by people who do not have final authority. Once an agreement is reached, Brazilians expect to document it with a detailed legal contract.

Appointments should be made 2–3 weeks in advance, although appointments can be scheduled on short notice if needed. In Sao Paulo and Brasilia, punctuality is expected, although you may be kept waiting. Brazilians generally feel that time is outside of their control and other events may intervene to change schedules. In Rio de Janeiro, punctuality is appreciated, but not strictly observed.

If you are invited to a home, bring a small gift or flowers for the hostess; avoid purple flowers. Purple and black are associated with funerals, as

are gifts of handkerchiefs. It is acceptable to arrive up to 30 minutes late for a dinner party and up to an hour late

for large parties. Even casual dress for social events should be stylish and more formal than in other countries.